

PUBLIC COMMENT

Re: 'FCC Notice of Public Rulemaking on 'Video Franchises'

February 2, 2006

I write this letter with a grave concern for the future survival of community television stations in the United States of America. I am a new producer at Manhattan Neighborhood Network. Community Public Access Television is a voice for our communities. Perhaps, it is for this very reason that it is now threatened.

Cable Television Networks signed an agreement with the communities that they sought to serve when they initially 'entered the market'. They willingly agreed to pay a franchise fee to support community cable ventures. In exchange for access to our market, to be cable giants such as Time Warner and Cablevision promised the community access to the means of television production. A mere fraction of these franchise fees are assigned to support Public Access Television. Through these funds, community stations such as Manhattan Neighborhood Network came into existence and have served our communities with prominence. An eclectic representation of Manhattan communities may be viewed on channels 34, 56, 57 and 67. New internet and telephony technologies will make it possible to tweak even more bandwidth from cable lines. So, the new VoIP companies and the major cable networks look to grab as much spectrum (and profits) as they can by encroaching on Community Public Access Television spectrum.

The public airwaves are exactly that: Public. We, the people are the true owners of the spectrum. It is our needs that these companies have been charged with serving. Sadly, unprecedented levels corporate greed have factored to once again renege on their contractual agreements. In so doing, they demonstrate themselves to be undeserving of their public trust. Perhaps, these companies must be reminded that they have been contracted to serve communities.

Congress will consider legislation which threatens public access television. For many years, they reaped outrageous profits. Today, Time Warner is one of the richest corporations in the world. Now, the same companies that have succeeded so magnificently off of the backs of the community want to change the terms of agreement.

As a concerned citizen, I write to the FCC to suggest what I would do if I were in a position to make decisions on this matter. I would tell the cable companies, the new internet phone companies and any others who want to

hop on our bandwidth that the privilege comes at the price of serving the community. That means that the local franchise fee that now supports public access TV (and that, perhaps in the future will support public access internet, public access VoIP) must be paid. Any company which chooses not to pay the fee has the option of not using the public's bandwidth.

High priced lobbyists representing these companies have tried to couch this issue as a matter of 'choice'. They claim that cable companies and the other tech companies muscling in on the bandwidth will be able to provide the public with more and better viewing options. Yet, these same lobbyists promote legislation which will restrict public access TV.

I hope the public is not duped into believing that 'choice' will ever be effectively be provided by these companies. Hundreds of channels have not necessarily, provided cable viewers with a variety of choices. I hope that the public realizes that 'choice' is available to them on stations that they currently have; in the form of Public Broadcasting and Community TV. Public Access TV is more likely to provide choice than commercial TV will. This is true, for the very reason that public access TV is not motivated by profit. It's mission is to train, serve and represent the community.

I urge that we maintain our ability to produce community programs. Do not pass legislation that would further corporate profits at the expense of the people. Community Television is a national treasure that must continue to exist.

Sincerely,

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